Dedication Service of a State Historical Marker

Commemorating
The Reverend Absalom Jones
and The Founding of
St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church

at

The Church's Original site
Fifth Street and St. James Place

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sunday, September 30, 1984

3:30 P.M.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Co-sponsored by St. Thomas' Historical Society
and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Historic St. Thomas' Episcopal Church

St. Thomas' Church is an outgrowth of the Free African Society, organized in April 1787, under the leadership of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen as a result of an unfortunate experience at a Philadelphia church. The Free African Society in Philadelphia was organized for benevolent as well as for religious purposes. Absalom Jones and the Society eventually organized as St. Thomas' African Church in 1792.

On the 17th of July, 1794 St. Thomas' African Church was formally opened in its new edifice at Fifth and Adelphia Streets, thus marking this event as the first regularly organized religious body among the colored people of the United States. It was chartered by the State of Pennsylvania in 1796. Absalom Jones was ordained deacon in 1795 by the Rt. Reverend William White, first Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, and as Priest in 1804. St. Thomas affiliated with the established Episcopal Church, but it was not given equal status until the time of the Civil War (1864).

St. Thomas' Church with Absalom Jones as its first Rector became a great educational power among the people of the early republic. He, with Richard Allen, rendered yeoman service in the yellow fever scourge that gripped Philadelphia in the year 1793. In 1796 an insurance company was started and operated for some time. All of its officers were members of St. Thomas' Church, led by the Reverend Mr. Jones. The Vestry of St. Thomas established a day school in 1804 for the instruction of the youth. In 1809 a society was formed by the leading men of that day for the suppression of vice and immorality among Negroes of this community. In 1797, when the first African Lodge of Philadelphia was warranted, Absalom Jones was installed by Grand Master Prince Hall as the first Worshipful Master of the Lodge. In 1815, with the formulation of the first independent African Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, Absalom Jones was elected as the first Grand Master, and served two years.

The historical record reveals that the "black presence" was felt everywhere during the Revolutionary era, although it was frequenly ignored at the time and minimized in later years. The fathers of St. Thomas' Church were men of wonderful patience and deeply imbued with self-reliance and determination. They were never suppliant and possessed a high quality of self-respect that has characterized this church down through the years.

At the death of Absalom Jones, there were no men of color properly prepared to take his place and the pulpit was filled with white clergymen until the arrival of William Douglass, who served the church from 1834 until his death in 1862. Other priests who served our historic parish were: William James Alston, 1863-1872; John Pallam Williams, 1882-1891; Owen M. Waller, 1893-1896; E. G. Knight, 1897-1901; George A. McGuire, 1902-1905; A. C. V. Cartier, 1906-1912; Archdeacon Henry L. Phillips, 1912-1914; William E. Hendricks, 1914-1918; F. A. Garrett, 1919-1926; James A. Deaver, 1926-1931; Robert W. Bagnall, 1933-1943; Jesse F. Anderson, 1944-1975; Robert E. DuBose, Jr., 1976-.

As the year 2000 approaches on the horizon, we are acutely aware of the mission that our forefathers carefully nurtured, and which this congregation must zealously preserve for future generations.

PROGRAMME

Presiding - Mrs. Elizabeth J. Forrester
Chairperson, St. Thomas' Historical Society

The Invocation _____ The Rev. Dr. Van S. Bird
Interim Rector, St. Simon's Episcopal Church

The Old Testament Lesson _____ The Rev. Dr. Joseph L. Joiner
Pastor, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church

The New Testament Lesson _____ The Rev. Clyde W. Henry
Pastor, Zoar United Methodist Church

The Unveiling of the Historical Marker-

The Blessing of the Marker _____ The Rev. Dr. Robert E. Du Bose, Jr.
Rector, Historic St. Thomas' Episcopal Church

The Negro National Hymn _____ "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
The Choir and Audience

Remarks On Behalf Of:

The Historical and Museum Commission _____ The Honorable Hardy Williams

The City of Philadelphia _____

The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania _____ The Rev. James A. Trimble
Rector, Old Christ Church and
President, the Standing Committee

The Black History Advisory Committee _____ Mrs. Shirley Turpin-Parham

The Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge
of Pennsylvania _____ Most Worshipful Grand Master
Robert N. Davis

The Union of Black Episcopalians-

Historic St. Thomas' Episcopal Church _____ The Rev. Dr. Robert E. Du Bose, Jr.

Benediction _____ The Rev. Canon Edwin E. Smith, Assistant,
Historic St. Thomas' Episcopal Church

We sincerely appreciate your attendance and participation on this Historic occasion!

• • • • •

You are cordially invited to attend the Reception, following this Dedication Ceremony, at the Afro-American Historic and Cultural Museum, Seventh and Arch Streets, Philadelphia Pennsylvania.

• • • • •

Our Special Thanks to:

Mr. George R. Beyer, Associate Historian and Coordinator of The Historical Marker Program, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for his guidance and assistance.

Mrs. Frances I. Clark, Coordinator and Members of The Reception Committee

Mr. Emory J. Thomas, Jr. St. Thomas' Rector's Warden and all others who contributed finances and time to make today possible.